Christmas at Starbucks

An account by Liberté Locke about working at Starbucks in New York over the Christmas season.

Starbucks is a job in which the boss is so shitty that he can lose everything in Hurricane Sandy and his sympathy only lasts a couple weeks. Workers roll their eyes and those unable to bite their tongues can't help but utter the word "karma." Disrespectful employee reviews bring everyone swiftly back to remembering that while their aunt, cousin, lover, or babysitter is still living in the dark, 27 flights up in the projects, wondering why the Red Cross is ballin' and they're living on scraps—paying for Metrocards that equal crowded shuttle buses on lines yet to be restored—this guy was inconvenienced, but only briefly. It's a victory to get to work only 20 minutes late, but of course the boss doesn't think so. Out-of-towners are more understanding about what we've gone through than the boss who felt its effects. He's stable soon enough—a quick recovery while we struggle. The boss can't make a latte—the one who gave everyone low scores on "customer focus" when he couldn't remember a single regular's name when asked. His paycheck would imply he makes every drink himself.

Beverage sales go up, transactions skyrocket, retail sales climb while hours are cut, breaks are "forgotten," reviews are irate and offensive.

A female co-worker of mine had taken enough. She settled it the way things get settled in New York. She punched the boss and broke the glass door in the store. When I came into work the next day I was sure I'd somehow be blamed for the door. The day before, Corporate (Starbucks' headquarters) finally forced me to remove all but one union pin on my uniform. This moment came after five years of court battles over wearing multiple union pins on the job (and fighting for the reinstatement of our members, including Daniel Gross). After losing four appeals, Starbucks finally won, once—and that was enough. I threw all my Starbucks-issued pins in the garbage and got a lot of sympathy from coworkers who especially respected my Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. pin that I was no longer permitted to wear. I had assumed it was some middle of the night vandalism that most Starbucks workers have become accustomed to—globally they're used to much more than broken glass. I inquired with the openers and learned of our newest folk hero. The woman who did what justified fears of firing and jail time prevented others from doing so many times before. If karma was real (and it'd been someone higher up), I'd think that punch was for EW Daniel.

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simultaneously, the manager being reported by workers and then finally attacked by one? They send emails applauding his "leadership." These emails are posted for everyone to see that our credit has been stolen— probably turned into a bonus that we'll never get.

Just before Christmas, Corporate decided to "thank" us. Almost every district manager (DM) in Manhattan barged into our store during the morning rush, and loudly and badly sang a Christmas carol. Our DM came behind the counter (in the way of drinks being made) and held up a giant

laminated board signed by the DMs and just said "Thanks for your…(blah, blah, blah)." She read it loudly—more to the customers as a ploy than to us as an actual "thank you." I shouted from my register, "That doesn't look like a giant check to me?!" My coworkers at the registers turned back to taking customers and said to each other loudly, "Yeah, where's our Christmas bonus, huh?"

To add insult to injury, the DMs commandeered two big tables to sit for lunch—a crowd of 10

people that have spent years trying to fire me, three of which have individually attempted, in vain, to have me arrested at pickets. They jumped the line, ordered several complicated drinks and bought most of our sandwiches—of course they wanted them warmed and some without cheese. It

was on the company card, they overworked us, piss off regulars and, unsurprisingly, they DID NOT

TIP. It's clear they were celebrating our hard work with a free lunch. Some workers nibbled on the shitty grocery store-bought box of star-shaped cookies they left us. I told folks that Kinkos makes those signs for 40 bucks and it'd be nice if they put $40 in the tip jar instead. We didn't feel appreciated— we felt shit on as grown people with bills, children, and college to pay for with star-shaped cookies. Then a customer in a maintenance uniform handed me and a co-worker each a $20

bill and said, "It's for you, Merry Christmas." We were reminded that workers take care of workers.

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